

## Fr. Cedric Prakash

"Recent Communal Violence in Gujarat, India, and the U.S. Response": FR. CEDRIC PRAKASH, SJ Prepared Testimony

### A WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO THE US COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

My name is Fr. Cedric Prakash and I am a Jesuit Priest of the Gujarat Province in North-West India. I am currently the Director of the Province Office of Integral Social Development of the Gujarat Jesuits which is also A Centre for Human Rights, Justice, and Peace, called Prashant (a flyer of this centre is appended to this document). We are located in Ahmedabad, which is the commercial capital of Gujarat State.

I have other responsibilities and commitments at local, national and international levels (my CV is appended). For more than 14 years I was the Director of another Jesuit social organization, St. Xavier's Social Service Society. During my tenure there, the organization did creditable work in the field of communal harmony and peace. This work has been well documented and has also constituted significant parts in two books "Do No Harm" by Mary Anderson (Rienner, 1999; ISBN L - 4487 - 834 - 2) and in "Sharpening Conflict Management" by Joseph G. Bock (Praeger, 2001; ISBN - 0 - 274 - 97400 - 6). I would also like to add that I am the recipient of the 'Kabir Puraskar' which is India's highest civilian prize for communal peace and harmony. At present, I am also a liaison for the Local Capacities for Peace Project which is an initiative of the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA) based in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

With the above introduction, I now wish to make the following submissions to the Commission on International Religious Freedom of the United States:

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that February 27th /February 28th 2002, was the beginning of unprecedented violence in the State of Gujarat, North-West India.

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that this violence was in fact the highlight of several months and years of attacks on

minorities and other vulnerable communities which also included downright perverse activities like the tampering of the school history text books, propagating untruths against minorities and intimidation and harassment at various levels.

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that this violence involved murder, arson, loot, rape, burning, destruction of property and was targeted solely at the Muslim community of Gujarat.

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that all evidence gathered by us and from my own eye witness account, it is evident that this violence was not a mere communal riot or "a spontaneous reaction" but a meticulously planned and efficiently executed pogrom and ethnic cleansing of the Muslim minority in Gujarat. As more and more concrete evidence pours in, civil society in India is convinced that it is a genocide (we are appending 25 lead essays/articles from some of the best know newspapers and journals of India which testify to this).

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that the complicity of the Gujarat State and its administration is without doubt. The fact that mobs were allowed to roam the streets and indulge in every form of terror and violence with the backing of the local police, leaves no room for any two opinions. There is enough evidence to show the direct involvement of senior ministers of the Government directing mobs; besides several high level functionaries of the affiliates of the right wing, Hindu Nationalists Party (the Bharatiya Janata Party - BJP) like the Bajrang Dal, The Vishwa Hindu Parishad, The RSS (The Rashtriya Swayam Sangh) and others were directly involved in this carnage.

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that even today, over 100 days after the start of this pogrom, practically none of the guilty (very specially the big names) have been brought to book.

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that reports and evidences suggest that these groups have been indulging in a terror campaign very systematically over the years very specially against minority groups like the Dalits, the Adivasis (tribals), the Muslims and the Christians. I, (who also happen to be the spokesperson of the Christian community in Gujarat) can testify that on three different occasions, these very groups assaulted me very badly and have unleashed a reign of terror against my efforts to champion human rights and freedom of all religions. Further, I we have also been informed from reliable sources that these terror groups receive heavy funding from foreign countries mainly the United States.

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that I would further like to submit that even today, apart from the fact that more than 2000 Muslims have been killed, about 600,000 have fled the State and almost 150,000 are still languishing in relief camps - there are no serious efforts being made by the Government of Gujarat to stop this ethnic cleansing. The twin fundamentals of security and justice are not being met. Efforts are being made to send the Muslim refugees away from the security of a camp. It is definitely not possible for them to go back to their homes. The only possibility is that they seek refuge in some already existing Muslim ghettos. This, in a way, will be the achievement of the current onslaught where a minority group is totally relegated to becoming a second class citizen and forced to live in areas and situations which could breed more violence.

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that addressing the twin fundamentals of security and justice means that the State has to ensure that there are checks and balances, protection of life and property and the guarantee of all constitutional freedoms to every citizen to live in the place of his or her choice, without let or hindrance. Further, there has to be explicit and implicit messages sent to the victims of this current carnage that fair play and justice will triumph. It means very clearly that those who are guilty of murder, rape, arson, etc. are not allowed to freely roam the streets and neighborhoods.

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that in the years 1998 and 1999, the Christians of Gujarat were already subject to violence and harassment and this continues in subtle ways even today. In January 2002, we had already sent out a circular (appended) to all our institutions, warning of the possibilities of attack by Hindu fundamentalists. In their effort to propagate their Hindutva ideology, the possibility of Christians being their next target in Gujarat is a valid fear (see attached interviews).

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that what is taking place in Gujarat is no internal matter. Human rights violations and the denial of fundamental freedoms in any part of the world is a matter of concern for the Global community. The reality of Gujarat today is being well documented through comprehensive reports by several fact finding teams which include international groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch and foreign missions such as the European Union and the United Kingdom Government.

As I place this brief written testimony before this august commission, in the name of the thousands of victims of Gujarat, I earnestly appeal to you, to make all necessary interventions so that

the carnage in Gujarat is halted immediately and that every citizen of the State is guaranteed full security and justice and all the freedoms guaranteed by the International Bill of Human Rights.

Fr. Cedric Prakash S.J.

Director, Prashant